

Early Learning Issues Group Report to the Governor's Coordinating Council

Early Learning is one of three critical issues identified by the Governor's Coordinating Council for Families and Children. An early learning issues group established by the Council was tasked with reviewing needs and issues, identifying a model program, and providing recommendations to improve early childhood services and program development across the state.

The Early Learning Issues Group elected to:

- Review early learning programs
- Identify and recommend a strong research based early learning program with Idaho and national data
- Apply the Priorities Template as part of the issues group analysis
- Recommend a model program for implementation across the state.

Recommended Program

The issues group identified Parents as Teachers (PAT) as a model of excellence for implementation throughout the state. This program has an extensive history nationally and in Idaho. It actively utilizes and engages parents as the core strategy in early learning. PAT can be easily integrated with existing programs such as high-risk preschools, Head start, and Even Start. Currently PAT operates in a wide range of sites within the state (See Attachment 1).

Significant reliable data exists for Parents as Teachers on a statewide and national level. The Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC) have conducted independent evaluation studies: (1985, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1998) Key findings from Idaho and national evaluations can be found in Attachment 2.

Key Issues and Considerations

Public Awareness – Communities with PAT programs are well aware of the benefits. Many of the current programs have waiting lists from 20-275 families. While programs are encouraged to invite local and state policy makers to activities to promote awareness, this has not had major impact. The issues group concludes that awareness exists but not at the important "power" level. The group believes that for many people, early learning is considered "nice but not necessary".

Coordination, Cooperation, Collaboration – Confusion abounds related to the various programs which address early childhood. Early childhood programs have not tended to collaborate well. Early childhood programs are scattered across systems and may not be aware of similar programs.

Active Partnerships – Partnerships have been created in the past few years. There are school district collaborations, the University of Idaho PAT demonstration project, the Idaho Head Start Collaboration council, the Albertson Foundation Early Childhood Initiative, Success by Six, and TANF funds through the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

Momentum Factors – the issues group believes factors that will contribute to greater interest and advocacy for early childhood programs include an increasing interest and awareness of early learning stimulated by recent brain development research; potential federal funding and push for early childhood programs; Governor's Coordinating Council sponsorship; the Idaho Supreme Court Needs Assessment of Services to Families and Children that identified early childhood as an important issue; and the University of Idaho PAT Demonstration Project.

Potential Partnerships - Develop coordination and collaboration with Head Start, Even Start, public and private schools, hospitals, universities, community agencies, libraries and state agencies, Association of Idaho Cities (Asset work), Idaho Court District Teams.

Issue Group Recommendations

1. Establish a Cross System Coordinating Committee by region to stimulate local awareness, collaboration, and funding momentum. Success by Six is a potential organization to accomplish this. The regional meetings can discuss who should participate and what the role of the regional coordinating committee might be. The Garden of Early Learning (Idaho Head Start) is a recommended working document.

2. Establish a strong alliance with the Association of Idaho Cities. This organization is extensively involved in Asset Building in Idaho's communities.
3. Involve local businesses, Chambers of Commerce – What cross system groups exist in your region. (For example, Idaho Judicial Districts have cross system teams to coordinate services.
4. Benefit from the experience of others. Considerable information exists on early childhood. The need and benefits are well established, although awareness and emphasis continue to be major issues.
5. Coordinate and Collaborate with like-minded organizations, interest groups, and advocates. The issues group was mindful of this observation: "Never doubt that a small group of determined people working together can change the world." A useful reference document for system change is *Learning from Starting Points: Findings from the Starting Points Assessment Project*. (Summarized in Attachment 3)

Attachment 1

PAT Priorities Template Analysis

What PAT models exist in Idaho? – Priority 1

1. Schools:

- A. Even Start Family Literacy---
 - (1) U of I Even Start
 - (2) Whitepine School District:
 - a. Bovill Elementary Preschool
 - b. Deary Elementary Preschool
 - (3) Madison School District – *Project Love, Language, & Literacy*
 - (4) Both Even Starts/school district programs are recent recipients of 21st Century Learning Center grants (\$2 million for each site for the next 3 years).
- B. Nampa High School Teen Parent Program
- C. Garden Valley, Horseshoe Bend and Basin School Districts – Preschools
 - (1) Boise County Community Justice/PAT)
- D. Coeur d' Alene School District:
(School Plus PAT & North Idaho Head Start/PAT)
 - (1) Skyway Elementary School
 - (2) Borah Elementary School
- E. Weiser School District PAT
- F. Shelley Joint School District (Dean Goodsell Elementary)
- G. Lewis & Clark State College – Family Education Program
- H. Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency (SEICAA) – Pocatello
 - (1) Partnership with school district's Teen Parent Program
- I. Foothills Preschool PAT – Boise

2. Head Start:

- A. North Idaho College Head Start– Coeur d' Alene
- B. Friends of Children & Families – Ada and Elmore Counties
- C. South Central Head Start
 - (1) Mini-Cassia area
 - (2) Twin Falls
 - (3) Hailey
 - (4) Hansen
 - (5) Jerome
- D. Coeur d' Alene Tribes Head Start
- E. Boise County Head Start (collaboration with Boise County Community Justice/Healthy Families/PAT project)

3. University of Idaho PAT Demonstration Project (Cooperative Extension

System:

- A. Nez Perce County
 - B. Bonner County
 - C. Boundary County
 - D. Gem County
 - E. Ada County
 - F. Gooding County
 - G. Power County
 - H. Caribou/Bear Lake/Oneida/Franklin Counties
 - I. Jefferson/Clark Counties
4. Child Abuse Prevention/Education:
- A. Family Advocate Program - Boise
 - B. Idaho Child Abuse Response & Education – Coeur d’ Alene
 - C. Help, Inc. – Idaho Falls
 - D. Boise County Community Justice/Healthy Families/PAT
5. Idaho Tribes:
- A. Coeur d’ Alene Tribe (Family and Children Education - FACE)
 - B. Shoshone – Bannock Tribes - Early Intervention/PAT
6. Idaho Migrant Council:
- A. Salud Y Provecho PAT
7. Miscellaneous:
- A. Clearwater County Free Library District – Infant Project (Orofino)
 - B. Success by 6 – Boise
 - C. Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency (SEICAA) – Pocatello
 - D. Family Services Alliance - Pocatello

Attachment 2

PAT Priorities Template Analysis

Data – Priority 2

1. *Parents as Teachers National Center* (PATNC) Independent evaluations/studies: (1985, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998).
2. Refer to PATNC website for details of studies (www.patnc.org)
3. Key findings:
 - A. PAT Children at age 3 were significantly more advanced in language, problem solving, other intellectual abilities, and social development than comparison children.
 - B. PAT parents were more knowledgeable about child rearing practices and development.
 - C. PAT Children scored significantly higher on standardized measures of reading and math at the end of first grade than did comparison children.
 - D. In all behavioral assess by teachers, the PAT children participant children were rated more highly than comparison children.
 - E. A significantly higher proportion of PAT parents initiated contacts with teachers and took a more active role in their child's schooling.
 - F. Second Wave Study: (400 randomly selected families enrolled in 37 diverse school districts across Missouri)
 - (1) Both children and parents benefited as compared with national norms on the measures used in the original pilot study.
 - (2) At age 3, Parents as Teachers children performed significantly higher than national norms on measures of intellectual and language abilities, despite the fact that the Second Wave sample was over-represented on all traditional characteristics of risk.
 - (3) More than one-half of the children with observed developmental delays overcame them by age three.
 - (4) Parent knowledge of child development and parenting practices significantly increased for all family types.
 - G. Follow-up study of the Second Wave sample:
 - (1) Overall, the relative level of achievement children demonstrated at age 3 on the completion of the PAT program was maintained in the first (or in some cases second) grade.
 - (2) This held true despite the broad diversity in children's experiences with preschool, childcare, kindergarten, and primary grades.
 - H. PAT program pilot study – Binghamton, NY, School District:
(Small sample of low income, high needs children to determine if PAT augments the effects of Head Start and Title I pre-kindergarten).
 - (1) Pre-K and kindergarten testing showed that the PAT children had significantly higher cognitive, language, social and motor skills than non-participants.
 - (2) These higher scores led to lower remedial and special education costs for first grade.
 - (3) PAT participants also had a substantially reduced welfare dependence and half the number of child abuse and neglect cases.

- I. PAT program study in 22 Missouri rural school districts:
 - (1) Found that children who participate in the PAT program for at least one year scored significantly higher on the Kindergarten Inventory of Developmental Skills (a commonly accepted measure of school readiness) than students who did not participate in PAT.
 - (2) Study involved more than 500 students, nearly half of whom qualified for free or reduced meals at school.
 - J. Parkway School District, St. Louis County:
 - (1) Third graders having previously participated in PAT developmental screening services scored significantly higher on standardized measures of achievement than nonparticipating counterparts.
 - (2) PAT children had a national percentile rank of 81, while nonparticipating students had a rank of 63 on the Stanford Achievement Test, with significant difference in scores on all subtests.
 - (3) PAT graduates were less likely to receive remedial reading assistance or to be held back a grade in school.
4. Idaho PAT Program findings:
- A. Nampa High School Teen Parent: (1998-2001)
 - (1) 17% increase in graduation and 50% decrease in dropout rates for PAT teen parents as compared to non-PAT teens.
 - (2) Teen Parent Annual Survey (2000-2001):
 - a. 57 students surveyed, 33 responses
 - b. 50% report that Parent Support Group involvement improved their school attendance.
 - c. 62% report an improved attitude toward school.
 - d. 100% report they have improved their ability to communicate with others in a positive way.
 - e. 100% report improved relationships with others.
 - f. 75% report their improved ability to find positive ways to resolve problems.
 - B. Bovill Elementary School (Whitepine School District):
 - (1) Kindergarten teacher credits the PAT/preschool for better preparing children for school entry.
 - (2) By the end of the school year, the same teacher reports that she was able to add one more month into the curriculum.
 - C. Kindergarten screening: Basin, Garden Valley, Horseshoe Bend, Madison, Sugar-Salem school districts report increased school readiness among children participating in PAT.
 - D. Basin School District (Basin Elementary/Preschool -Idaho City):
 - (1) As the result of increased school readiness, preschool and elementary teachers are collaborating in curriculum development.

Attachment 3

Learning from Starting Points: findings from the Starting Points Assessment Project. This report describes how funders can provide momentum for concentrated networking and activities that can change the threshold of expectation, communication, vision, policy and practice around key aspects of young child well being. It provides a systematic analysis of a four and one half year systems change initiative beginning in 1995 to foster the well being of young children and their families by promoting responsible parenting, ensuring good health and protection, guaranteeing child care choices, and mobilizing communities to support young children and their families. Full Report can be accessed on the web site of the National Center For Children in Poverty.

Findings:

The sites primarily used five core strategies – sometimes separately and sometimes in combination with others, to achieve their goals. These strategies involved efforts to:

- Influence policies and increase resources
- Design, expand, and improve services
- Build new alliances and leadership among early childhood leaders, parents, and others.
- Promote public awareness and engagement
- Improve data and promote outcome-oriented policies

Nearly half of the state sites reported that the timing of the initiative was essential because it enabled them to move their already established early childhood agendas to new levels.

Virtually all the sites benefited from being the recipient of a Starting Points grant. The award enhanced the image of those receiving the grant and opened both policy and funding doors in unexpected ways. (Check the Idaho Foundations Book for state and local foundations).

The sites shared challenges included the difficulty of garnering support for legislation, sustaining legislative interest in an area once major legislation has been enacted, keeping the early childhood agenda a priority issue, and making the agenda broadly bipartisan.

Observable changes included

- Substantial legislative and policy gains
- Significantly increased public and private resources especially for child care
- Expanded network of services and service models
- Expanded advocacy for young children at local and state levels
- Strengthened state (and now national) capacity for training and technical assistance on the implementation of comprehensive early childhood initiatives
- New partnerships with the business community in selected sites
- Expanded family support programs and deepened attention to child care quality issues
- More focused leadership development strategies for parents.
- New models for media and public awareness campaigns and the use of strategic communication approaches on behalf of the early childhood agenda

- Dissemination of tools to track and promote quality improvement in early childhood settings
- New forums – coalitions, councils, and organizations – to drive the next set of activities across the sites
- Deepened leadership capacity for early childhood issues across the sites.

Key Lessons for Funders and Policy Makers

- Relatively limited foundation dollars, used strategically, can be a catalyst for large-scale system change.
- Flexible funding, when coupled with clear and “big goals,” enables grantees to be strategically opportunistic, to take smart risks, and to respond to unexpected challenges.
- The Start Points experience suggests that using the foundation grant deliberately to leverage access to new resources or to facilitate the better use of existing resources is a powerful way to influence a local context.
- Using foundation resources to help change the larger policy context within which sites work, or at least situating the expectations in the larger policy context while giving support to sites, can provide a kind of “cover” and legitimacy to the sites that can enhance their success.
- Allowing grantees to invest in relationships – especially at the beginning of a grant period – without expecting immediate and concrete results, can have a long-term pay-off.
- Promoting cross-site knowledge transfer, leadership development, and a learning culture throughout the course of a multisite initiative can help to sustain the gains of the initiative.
- Having mechanisms in place to link grantees with timely, flexible peer and expert technical assistance can make a difference, particularly in emerging strategic areas such as communication and outcome design and management.
- Planned, periodic opportunities for strategic reflection and testing of assumptions, goals, and pathways can strengthen the impact of the foundation’s support at the local level and achievement at all sites.
- Funders should be willing to help the sites use their money both to meet the foundation purposes and to craft or further a vision for sustained change at the site. Such a philanthropic devolution approach is highly valued by grantees.
- Setting clear expectations early on (or at least a process for arriving at them and how the efforts will be evaluated) and defining success are important to grantees.